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SHAKESPEARE.

AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED TO THE POSITIVIST SOCIETY OF LONDON,

ON THE 2ND OF AUGUST, 1885

(18 DANTE 97),

AT STRATFORD-ON-AVON.

BY

VERNON LUSHINGTON.

"Even just between Twelve and One, even at the turning
o' the tide."—*Henry V.*, act ii., sc. 3.



LONDON:

REEVES AND TURNER, 196, STRAND.

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SHAKESPEARE.



CONGRATULATE you that through the social zeal of Mr. Frederic Harrison and other friends, we Positivists are here as a company in Shakespeare's Stratford-on-Avon. I hope you may find that Time the changer, and even the subversive hand of modern Industry, have dealt gently with the place. In any case, you must be saying, "Here, then, it was Shakespeare was born; here he lived as child and boy; in these fields, by that river, he walked and played; here he wooed his wife; here, after the struggle of his London career, he returned and made his settled home; amid this rural peace he composed his latest and greatest dramas; here, while yet in the full strength of mid-life, he died, and in yonder church he lies buried." Eye and memory and imagination work happily together. The seen calls up the unseen, helped by the kind human tradition and the remembered spell of the Poet's divine art. The things, beautiful as they are, are such as we see elsewhere—common things—the green meadows, the ripening harvest fields, the quiet flowing water, the village street, the grey parish church. But they are all touched by the grace of Shakespeare's presence. They might seem to say, each in its own way, and according to its own nature, "He saw us and loved us. And we knew him; day by day we saw him and loved him. He was not a book; he was a man." So saying, they speak of much more than Shakespeare. They speak of Humanity. They speak of Humanity's first characteristic, human solidarity,—the equal

brotherhood of quick and dead,—that strong reality, in which Theology pretends to find exceptions, but whose universality we cannot too unreservedly, too sympathetically, acknowledge. Not less do they speak of that higher characteristic of Humanity, human continuity, that most majestic and most hopeful truth, of which Theology claims a fraction for its own glorification, and contradicts all the remainder. For one of the most inevitable impressions we receive here, in Shakespeare's home and amid his memorials, is that generations have passed between him, our benefactor, and us who have since had so many other benefactors. The Earth changes, but remains: Shakespeare is dead, but he lives, his soul lives in our souls: Humanity persists and grows. Nor less again, when we look on his grave, does that other inexorable aspect of the same truth touch every one—that a man's life now determines the quality of his life after death. The night cometh, wherein no man may work.

We are here to-day to make holiday, but with something of the aim, something of the spirit, of *Pilgrims*. Is it not so? Yes, in this August, 1885, travelling with Cook's tickets, we are Pilgrims, such as the spiritual condition of the West in the nineteenth century permits—Pilgrims who have got to our place of pilgrimage. Ceremony we have little. We don't even do as the pilgrim, once described to me—I dare say it is a common case—who, on nearing the hilltop whence some sacred city—I think it was Jerusalem—was first to appear in view, halted, put off the rags he had worn on the march, and put on shining clothes. But we are here; and we may have grateful hearts.

Let me dwell on this thought of Pilgrimage, since it is a type of so much else, especially because it holds forth the union of Religion and joy, which belongs to my subject, and which I would especially make my subject.

As you all know that the avowed object of the Crusades was to win back the Holy Places in Palestine, you must in some measure be aware what an important institution Pilgrimage was to Christians in the Middle Ages. You know also, perhaps, how extensively Pilgrimage still prevails

among Mahommedans and Polytheists in the East. Yet so domineering is the scepticism which to-day encompasses us on all sides,—that same scepticism which permits even educated ladies in their conversation to profane the most venerable words in the language,—I mean such words as “awful” and “lovely,”—so domineering, I say, is this scepticism, that if you do not, like other people, regard Religious Pilgrimage with some disdain, as a foolish old-world practice, and one which with modern enlightenment cannot continue, it can only be because you are either special enthusiasts, or because you have strong Positivist tendencies. Most persons, like Shakespeare himself, have transferred their interest from social religion to personal romance; as one of his heroines says:—

“A true devoted Pilgrim is not weary
To measure kingdoms with his feeble steps,—
Much less shall she, that hath Love's wings to fly.”

I would have you think, however, of the vast religious services which have been rendered during all the Past by the habit of visiting sacred places. I say the habit, for much turns on that. The sacred place might be near or far,—near as local temple or parish church,—farther away, a day's journey or more, as the chief shrine or mother-city of the nation,—or far, far away,—over kingdoms,—in some distant land, where the pious visitor, arriving at last after many perils by land and sea, found himself an entire stranger,—in the Latin language, a *peregrinus*, whence our word Pilgrim. You see at once that the general habit of visiting sacred spots has ever formed the necessary basis of all organized and enduring social worship. You see also that Pilgrimage is but an extension of that habit,—spontaneous, it may be, or systematic, involving little labour or much, but in all cases implying the visitation of a sacred place with pious motive. Now observe, I pray, the powerful appeal to human affections incident to Pilgrimage. There is the personal journeying and adoration by the Pilgrim; there is the common faith and worship; there is the common shrine commemorating some benignant manifestation to men, oftenest the glorious life and death of some

man or men : for instance, one of the chief pilgrimages in the Middle Ages was to Rome, to the tombs of S. Peter and S. Paul. Observe, also, that the remoter pilgrimages did not take place in Polytheistic communities, for their religions were tribal or national ; but they naturally arose when Monotheism, Christian or Mahomedan, united many peoples in one faith. Thus the Emperor Constantine and his sister Helena built splendid churches on the cave of Bethlehem and the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem. And thus it was a precept of the Koran that every Mussulman who possibly could, ought once in his life to visit the tomb of the Prophet at Mecca. At almost all times, then, and under all conditions, human wisdom has made Pilgrimage a form of worship and a bond of religious union. The Pilgrimage was necessarily limited and coloured by the faith which it served : it might, as Monotheistic Pilgrimage did, cherish enmity to the alien unbeliever,—it might lead, it often did lead, to many irregularities on the way,—but within its natural limits, it was, so long as the faith remained sincere, a bond of love, and, for the most part, a means of grace and gladness. As an example of grace, take this,—that for centuries, every 9th of June, the women of Rome walked barefoot to the Temple of Vesta, the goddess of domestic union.¹ As an example of gladness, the

¹ Had time admitted, attention would have been called to an instance from the depth of the eighteenth century, the following letter of Boswell to Johnson :—

“ Sunday, September 30, 1764.

“ MY EVER DEAR AND MUCH RESPECTED SIR,—You know my solemn enthusiasm of mind. You love me for it, and I respect myself for it, because in so far I resemble Mr. Johnson. You will be agreeably surprised when you learn the reason of my writing this letter. I am at Wittemberg in Saxony. I am in the old church where the Reformation was first preached, and where some of the reformers lie interred. I cannot resist the serious pleasure of writing to Mr. Johnson from the tomb of Melancthon. My paper rests upon the gravestone of that great and good man, who was undoubtedly the worthiest of all the reformers. He wished to reform abuses which had been introduced into the Church ; but had no private resentment to gratify. So mild was he, that when his aged mother consulted him with anxiety on the perplexing disputes of the times, he advised her to ‘keep to the old religion.’ At this tomb, then, my ever dear and respected friend, I vow

good fellowship of Chaucer's Pilgrims will naturally occur to you, but it is by no means the best instance, because the pleasure is often far apart from the faith. The union of religious fervour with social joy is a special characteristic of the pilgrimages practised under the more genial Polytheisms. Let me read you the opening passage of a most instructive book on Central India, by Sir William Sleeman, who knew the country well and its inhabitants.

"Before setting out on our journey towards the Himalah, we formed once more an agreeable party to visit the marble rocks of the Nerbuddah at Beraghat. It was the end of October, when the Hindoos hold fairs on all their sacred streams, at places consecrated by poetry or tradition as the scene of some divine work or manifestation. These fairs are at once festive and holy,—every person who comes enjoying himself as much as he can, and at the same time seeking purification from all past transgressions by bathing and praying in the holy stream, and making laudable resolutions to be better for the future. The ceremonies last five days, and take place at the same time upon all the sacred rivers throughout India; and the greater part of the whole Hindoo population, from the summits of the Himalah mountains to Cape Comorin, will, I believe, during these five days, be found congregated at these fairs. In sailing down the Ganges, one may pass in the course of a day half a dozen such fairs, each with a multitude equal to the population of a large city, and rendered beautifully picturesque by the magnificence and variety of the tent equipages of

to thee an eternal attachment. It shall be my study to do what I can to render your life happy; and if you die before me, I shall endeavour to do honour to your memory; and, elevated by the remembrance of you, persist in noble piety. May God, the Father of all beings, ever bless you; and may you continue to love your most affectionate friend and devoted servant,

"JAMES BOSWELL."

Having written this letter, Boswell kept it back, fearing "lest he should appear at once too superstitious and too enthusiastic." Nearly thirteen years afterwards, hearing that his old friend was ill, he sent it to him. Another thirteen years, and he published (1790) the "Life of Johnson."

the great and wealthy. . . . Our tents were pitched upon a green sward on one bank of a small stream running into the Nerbuddah close by, while the multitude occupied the other bank. At night all the tents and booths are illuminated, and the scene is hardly less animating by night than by day; but what strikes an European most is the entire absence of all tumult and disorder at such places. He not only sees no disturbance, but feels assured there will be none; and leaves his wife and children in the midst of a crowd of a hundred thousand persons, all strangers to them, and all speaking a language and following a religion different from theirs, while he goes off the whole day hunting and shooting in the distant jungles, without the slightest feeling of apprehension for their safety or comfort."

The writer marks here, perhaps unconsciously, the distinction between the semi-barbarous personal pleasure of the modern European materialist and the religious social pleasure consecrated by antique faith. At any rate so orderly, so happy, so widely beneficent Pilgrimages may be; such, on a wide scale, and for ages, under favouring circumstances, they have been. And now I venture to ask: Neglected as Pilgrimages now are, may there not be a happy habit of Pilgrimage in the future, when the Religion of Humanity shall have attained, as it must seek to attain, a fit and beautiful Worship, and when it shall have imparted something of a happy order to our now distracted Modern Society? For Positivism, with complete purpose, incorporates into its system the undying Fetichistic spirit which has been the spontaneous source of all Pilgrimages: especially do we love and reverence the Grave. Positivism also surpasses every Theocracy in veneration for the Past; it puts yet higher the consecrating power of Death. Again, more truly than ever Greek or Roman faith, it honours human heroes, for it admits no divine rivals. Again, its faith is both more definite and more generous than Catholicism or Islam, for it is the faith of Humanity, which embraces all science, all art, and all human achievement whatsoever, and sympathizes with every form of human happiness; and its love, unlike that of any Monotheism,

extends to all the worthy of whatsoever creed through space and time.

Cherishing that faith, seeking that love, and longing for that worship, we meet here to-day to commemorate one of the greatest benefactors of the race. The benefactor in this case was a poet. I therefore remind you of the singular, the unexampled dignity assigned to Art in the Positivist scheme. Many persons think that Positivism consists in Science or Philosophy only. They make a grand mistake; they don't know, indeed, what they are talking about. Science is to us indispensable; we accept it and we study it; we would make it universally known as the sacred basis of all sound belief;—but Comte came to see himself and to teach us that Art should be ranked above Science, as something nearer and dearer to Humanity, more fitted, therefore, for constant study and meditation. I use the word Art here in a very large sense—for it is of many kinds; but in every case it is chosen human truth delivered in a form of beauty. In the Positivist Calendar, which, especially in its larger dispositions, is a constant mirror of the Positivist Faith, we not only find a month given to ancient Art, bearing in its front the august name of Homer, but in the modern half we have two months consecrated to modern Art: at the head of one is Dante; at the head of the other is Shakespeare. So in coming here, as pilgrims, to render homage to Shakespeare, we are acting in full conformity with the systematic teaching of our Religion.

Following up this line, and putting everything else aside, however interesting, I would mark the Positivist appreciation of Shakespeare as a religious one. I would claim a religious character, in the most sure and precious sense of the word, for Shakespeare's humane and beautiful work. Christian people of the stricter or looser sort may say, as some of them have said, "Humane and beautiful, yes; but not religious. What has Religion to do with Shakespeare?" Now I admit that there is some truth in this judgment; and especially I aver that Shakespeare himself would have claimed no special Christian quality for his work. But if the Christian religion has nothing to do with the poetic art,

the wisdom, goodness, wit, mirth and noble human portraiture, which all agree to honour under the name of Shakespeare, must we not say, "Shepherd, thou'rt in a parlous state, Shepherd!" That a Shakespeare should have arrived, should have chosen a calling proscribed by the Church, should have been such a mighty preacher and teacher of Human nature, and always virtually outside the Christian faith,—this, as it is one of the most convincing of modern phenomena, is also an awkward fact for the Christian apologist to deal with.

A very different difficulty is before the exponent of Positivism. The theory provided for him is ample, but he has to make its application good. He has to show the past life of Humanity which produced Shakespeare, and the character of his services to the life of Humanity which was to follow, remembering Ben Jonson's memorable words, "He was for all time." S. Paul said of himself, "By the grace of God, I am what I am." We say, By the grace of Humanity, Shakespeare was Shakespeare. From Humanity came his inherited genius; from Humanity came the arena in which he was to serve. Let none think this last unimportant. If, after having been born here, at Stratford, of John Shakespeare and Mary Arden in 1564, the little William had next year been taken out by Captain Francis Drake to the coast of Guinea, and had there been left with the negroes, to be brought up with them and to live among them,—well, we cannot say what he would have done; he might have been Prime Minister and Chief of Court Ceremonies to his Black Majesty,—but of this we may be sure, he would not have written those plays for us. For that not only England was required, but the general momentum of the whole Human Past.

Next, consider this: during that vast Past, as religion followed religion, each incorporated many of the results of its predecessors, and each was in turn the pride and joy of society. And thus of all time it is true, as Comte has said, "Man tends to become more and more religious." These glorious and delightful truths Christianity and Modern Scepticism alike deny,—deny or ignore;—did not

our schoolmasters teach us to deny them? But to Positivists they furnish the master-clue for every larger historical inquiry. Time will not permit me to call evidence to-day from the primitive Fetichisms under which Man first arose as Man, nor from the grand Theocracies which laid the deep foundations of Social Order, nor from the Polytheisms of Greece and Rome which led forward Humanity on her splendid progress. The extract I have read from Sleeman must serve as general type, the rest your sympathy must supply. But I take up the theme at Catholicism.

On the wreck of the old Polytheisms, 'once so full of mirth and beauty,—as the genius of Milton affectionately recalls in his Ode on the Nativity,—arose Catholicism. At the outset, this was an austere religion indeed. Read the Epistles of S. Paul, and you would think no good man had the right or the power to laugh, or to enjoy himself in any way. It is not easy, is it, to reconcile S. Paul and Shakespeare? The Earth no abiding city, but a vale of tears, of sin and sorrow and repentance; and the Christian, each individual Christian, a mere stranger and sojourner, seeking his own personal salvation, to be enjoyed in the unseen world to come. So it was declared and prescribed. Viewed as a permanency, this was an Arctic faith, uninhabitable to men; it really was a wintry faith, having latent in it a beautiful spring and summer. It was a complete parting from the Polytheism of the past, its works and ways, which "had worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator." It was a demand for spiritual life clenched and intensified by the absolute Monotheistic creed into a stern protest against the corruptions of Roman society which had ensued upon the decay of their early creeds and upon their sudden possession of the spoils of a conquered world,—including the men and women thereof, a multitude of slaves,—inhuman corruptions, that may be read of in Juvenal and in the early Christian Fathers, and of which the gladiatorial games were the most signal manifestation. The pure soul of Paul revolted against these depravities, which seemed so hateful to him, as hateful to the pure One God revealed by the

martyr Christ, whom he believed to be the Divine Son. But he did not, like Moses, call aloud to the loyal to separate themselves as a nation from the disloyal evil-doers; he did not say, "Get you up from among them;" he was no temporal ruler, he summoned each Christian believer to spiritually remove himself, to live spiritually apart, submitting in temporal things to the temporal heathen powers. Repentance, contrition of heart, purity of life, lifelong self-denial,—these were the first requirements of the new faith; these in the name of what seems to us now a fanciful and difficult doctrine, and certainly one of the most absolute kind—the atonement of God and man by Christ. But with these severe precepts came a Catholic message, a message to all, and that message a message of love, first devised and first uttered by S. Paul, the Roman citizen, who assuredly had drunk deep of the social, the universal spirit of Rome. I say a message to all, according to the text, "As in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive." It is true, however, and very important to note, that in the clause "in Adam all die," S. Paul meant all, the whole human race without exception, but in the latter clause, which promises salvation to all, he really limited all by a condition, faith in Jesus Christ,—a condition which proved impossible to the vast majority of the human race, past, present, and future, as S. Augustin states in reference to this very text;¹ and thus the universal hope of Catholicism was doomed to failure from the first.

Nevertheless, though thus fatally limited, though thus ungrateful and revolutionary towards the Past, though thus apparently unsocial, though thus apparently withdrawn from intellectual and practical and joyous life, the Catholic Church proved a noble widening and deepening of Religion. By virtue of its spiritual character and its independent organization it appealed more directly, more habitually, and more intimately to the heart than any of the ceremonial religions of antiquity; and it had power to unite in one

¹ "Non omnes qui in Adam moriuntur, membra erunt Christi; ex illis enim multo plures secundâ in æternum morte plectentur."—*De Civ. Dei*, xiii., 23.

Christian family not only all classes, but also numerous nations politically independent. I wish I could dwell upon the wisdom with which it worked with, or in control of the temporal powers, upon the purifying results of its discipline, upon its teachings of benevolence and compassion (so new then), upon its profound services to the people in tempering every kind of authority, in conferring upon every man the dignity of a son of the Church, in raising the honour of every woman, in exalting and training the affections. All these things stamped themselves upon the general life of Christendom; all these are most material to my subject, as having prepared Shakespeare's arena and Shakespeare's mind and heart. But I must especially point out that as time went on, and the Catholic Church grew to maturity, while it could not abandon its absolute doctrine, it did gradually clothe itself with beauty and delight. This was effected by the priesthood, who were wise enough to humanize their system by allowing the free play of fetichistic feeling, and by admitting a considerable measure of kindly Polytheism, such as gave them their shrines and sacraments, their saints and saintesses, and made Christ's earthly Mother to be the Queen of Heaven above and ruler of hearts below. Something of this humane sympathy and beauty you may feel when you look on the cathedrals and churches, those glorious popular possessions which the Middle Ages have left us,—perhaps a tithe of what once were. You may feel something of it, also, if you study, as you may well do, the truly poetical services which adorned their daily worship, and gave gladness or consolation to those occasions which are the universal landmarks of private life, such as birth, marriage, and death, linking them to the continuous life of the sacred community, the Church. And when you talk of "holidays," you may well remember that the word and thing came from Catholic "holy days." But for these holy days the slave or the serf would have slaved every day in the ever-running year. Notwithstanding all defects, all faults, the Catholic Religion was in its palmy time the pride and glory, the comfort and the happiness of Christian Europe. What is

also very noticeable is, that it drew to the ranks of the priesthood most of the choice spirits of the time; it was by their noble efforts these great results were produced.

I insist upon this; but I also insist that Catholicism was never adequate to the life of man. Much of human life, even as then developed, always escaped it. Catholicism was defective on every side, in some respects even more defective than its predecessors, especially because of its monotheistic doctrine. If everything was to be explained by the will of God, there was no occasion for science, none for practical skill or practical organization; it was only by a wise and generous inconsistency that the Catholic priesthood could make their religion do good service in these quarters, and only in a limited degree and for a limited time. For a similar reason, it had small power to inspire and direct social festivities, especially those in which intellectual effort blended with general pleasure. Sacred pictures the Church might have, sacred poems, and many of these most beautiful,—but what had the Church to do with mere human tragedies and comedies? A jealous God could not be supposed to value mere human joy—Dionysus and Apollo were far more human. By reason of these inherent defects, which the general progress only made more obvious and more embarrassing, Catholicism, having done its work, lost its hold upon the intellectual and active forces of society. Politics, Science, Industry, Art, and even Morals, slipped, slided, or broke away from it. Its decay was very visible at the beginning of the fourteenth century; deeper decay, deeper corruption followed; and in the sixteenth century the Protestant revolt broke out.

That revolt was necessary, was indispensable, and the services of Protestantism on the political side were heroic. But for them European Liberty, and with it European Science and Industry, must have been adjourned for a long date. But for them, as the history of the revolution in Holland for ever proclaims, the peoples of Europe would have been fettered hand and foot by a black ecclesiastical tyranny leaguering itself to local despots. Justly are the names of William the Silent and Oliver Cromwell honoured

in our Calendar. But having pointed out the defects of Catholicism on the intellectual and sympathetic sides, it is quite unnecessary for me to waste words on Protestantism. Happily, Protestantism had little power except for resistance, for its creed or creeds (they were many) were just as supernatural as Catholicism, and far less humane ; its State Churches announced beforehand their mean subserviency, and its more spiritual leaders made it their aim to try to bring back Apostolic times, and accordingly waged holy war against imagination and human pleasure. Sacred Catholic art the Protestants sought furiously to destroy as a soul-ruining superstition, but secular art was in their eyes hardly less guilty. The Stage in particular Puritanism condemned as a thing of the devil.

Into such a time of religious discord and decadence was Shakespeare born.

Now before speaking directly of him, let us, remembering what has since happened, cast an eye forward beyond his time and even ours. If, as you have seen in the past life of Humanity, Religion was ever the chief pride and joy of the community, and man did tend to become more and more religious, would it not be indeed a miracle if a condition so fundamental, a march so general, which had continued through all changes for thousands of years, had really ceased and finally stopped short at mediæval Catholicism, and man was thenceforward to be no more religious ? What I have to impress upon you is that Protestantism and Scepticism are but a revolutionary interlude which has been clearing the way for the grander and the grandest religious development. The débris of the Theologies and of Military Life will be cleared off, and those mighty growths, Modern Science and Modern Industry, which seem to-day so far away from Religion, and which are clearly destined to become universal, will join with all the essential results of the Past, and with all the best feeling, old and new, to form the elements of a completely human religion, under the over-arching doctrine of Humanity itself. Carrying out the grand principle instituted by Catholicism of keeping the spiritual and temporal powers distinct, Religion will

naturally extend a purifying and happy influence over all public and private life, and not least over the Politics, the Science, and the Industry, and the Art, which, since the decline of Catholicism, have been carried on, some so uncertainly, like Art, others, like Science and Industry, with such fierce restless energy, but all with little human affection, because unreligiously. Man will thus continue to become more and more religious; and Religion will surely be to us once more a pride and joy, because it will be our chief blessing. Now, to that Religion Shakespeare rendered in advance most admirable service.

Shakespeare was born in a world still rich with the outward and inward beauty created by centuries of Catholic Feudalism,—beauty so long established, so intimately diffused, so vitally incorporated into society, so valued for its own sake, as to seem self-existent, and to hide from view its origin; just, for instance, as language does which we use every day; when we say “Good-bye” to our friend, we don’t think how many centuries of thought and feeling went to the making of that word. This lingering autumnal beauty of Catholic Feudalism Shakespeare’s eye saw, his ear heard, and his heart received, and he spontaneously reproduced it, though he was in small sympathy with the official Catholicism which he knew. For it was otherwise as to those institutions and things which bore the Catholic seal too visibly; they had been either destroyed or mutilated; they were discredited and despised. Thus, as an example of so much else, the beautiful monuments of Catholic architecture and painting were ignored by Shakespeare as by everybody,—ignored, disregarded, probably even disliked, just because they were manifestly Catholic and religious. So the office of the Catholic priesthood and its value to past civilization were hidden from his eyes. It is most important for you to bear in mind this distinction between Catholicism patent and Catholicism latent; and to note that Catholic decay, of which Protestantism was but the violent form, attacked first the organization, then the doctrine, lastly the habits and feelings. The Catholic organization and Catholic doctrine Shakespeare repudiated;

Catholic habits, Catholic feelings, he in a large measure spontaneously cherished. Many of his characters bear the Catholic seal; above all, his female characters. Those flowers of civilization,—of what civilization were they but Catholic Feudalism?

For it was the same as to Feudalism, which also had long been in decay. Feudalism was still lordly, still proud and brilliant, still shining with much of the beautiful and tender romantic manners of long-ago chivalry; these manners Shakespeare reflected with magnificent sympathy. But the proper warrior-life of Feudalism, with its generous offices of protection, was over, and the feudal lords had acquired no satisfying pacific duties in their place; the ancient affections, whether local or personal, were on the wane, and the tie between lord and man, which had aimed to weld the whole of feudal society together in sacred martial fellowship, was growing less and less dependent on personal feeling; it was becoming a matter of mere rent and covenant. In its later stage Feudalism had been most licentious and oppressive. The lords had amused themselves by tearing one another in pieces in party wars; and then they had to be again decimated and coerced by the all-compelling Monarchy. Feudalism now revolved diligently round the Tudor Sovereign, looking to him as the dispenser of fat things, and dealt much in policy and intrigue. Like all the rest, it had lost hold of Religion. What had Religion to do with rents and covenants and self-seeking ambition? Shakespeare felt this.

But he lived also when the great wave of what is called the Renaissance movement was still possessing the chosen speculative minds of the West. *Renaissance*—new birth: new birth of what?—new birth of learning, of knowledge, of intellectual interest generally. The movement I speak of was essentially an intellectual movement, pursuing intellectual pleasure without measure. It has often been called a Pagan movement, but in truth it was neither Pagan nor Christian. It was a revolutionary sallying forth into the wide world out of the bonds of the Catholic system. It had no general faith but Man and Nature, with a var-

nish of vague theism. Man and Nature—what a seductive gospel! Does it not still sound sufficient, complete, beautiful? Nature—"Look you, this brave o'erhanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire!" Man—"What a piece of work is a man! how noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god!"—and so on. Ah, well! but here was the danger, though it was naturally disguised. It broke with the Past; above all, it broke with the Christian religion, which was then the only religion; nor was Humanity as a religious idea then within sight. Now Nature without Humanity is not an impossibility, nor is it quite a pestilent congregation of vapours, as Hamlet says, but it *is* a limitless chaos; and Man without Humanity is an impossibility. Let *a* man, let any man, try to do without Humanity if he can,—he cannot; without Humanity he cannot even exist; but let him try to do without it, try to live without duty to his kind,—fortunate is he if his selfish desires do not bring him quickly to the ground—to disgrace and ruin. And if any Society tries to do without Humanity, without reverence for the Past and care for the Future, what can the issue be but speedy dissolution, conflagration? For though Hamlet's fine description says nothing of desires, good or bad, the desires are the strongest part of every man, and his selfish desires are unceasingly striving to prevail against his social affections,—and they need control,—not only individual control, they need social control; above all, religious control. Hamlet, who represents the modern mind, in his wiser moods knows something of this—

"Give me that man

That is not passion's slave, and I will wear him

In my heart's core, ay, in my heart of heart."

The intellectual movement then was full of disorder and danger, but it was necessary; it was splendidly energetic, like virgin soil, and it produced most brilliant and admirable special results. It had extraordinary triumphs in the revival of ancient learning, in philosophy, in science,

and for a while in art, though for a time only, since art and irreligious turmoil do not well agree, as the long decline of the stage so sadly witnesses. Shakespeare was of this grand movement of magnificent ardour that somewhat disdained moral discipline. But his was a nature of generous and gracious affection, and he lived sufficiently near to the moral order bequeathed by the Middle Ages to spontaneously submit himself to much of it. To Shakespeare the English people seemed to say: "We are tired of church and priest and pulpit. Give us that which is human and real. Show us no saints or holy virgins, but men and women such as we know,—fathers and mothers, sons and daughters, friends and lovers. Give us what is sincere, spontaneous, hearty, fraternal, free. We are ready; our brightest sympathies are ready;—our household affections, our smiles, our laughter, our tears, our deepest thoughts, our tenderest love. Give, O brother, give!" Many others before Shakespeare had heard that call, or the like call, during the two previous centuries, and had answered it as they could. But Shakespeare most gloriously fulfilled it, fulfilled it in some directions beyond the most hopeful dreamer's utmost dream. He held the mirror up to Human Nature, exhibiting unexampled range alike of intellect, feeling, character, and action.

With what imagination he did this, with what noble choosing and ordering, with what adorning grace, what art that fulfilling nature betters it, transcends it, makes it his own and ours, I make no attempt to tell, though here is the true Shakespeare;—it must be for you to enjoy. I only say that I think this beautiful quality, or rather this assemblage of beautiful qualities, is finest, most gracious, most triumphant, most deeply satisfying, where it is freest,—that is, in those plays where the Poet is virtually unfettered by the literalities of time and place,—such a play, for instance, as "The Tempest." Once more we must repeat that Shakespeare was a mighty painter of human nature and human story. In this all are agreed. The general, the universal judgment, is spontaneously, inevitably right here. This is his most glorious crown; and for this Posi-

tivists as heartily as any, and more religiously than any, venerate and love his name.

I will now make some remarks upon the historical plays. In very many plays Shakespeare illustrates public as well as private life. The importance of this is very striking when you remember, on the one hand, how much modern politics and modern manners owe to mediæval courts, and, on the other, that modern romance can make nothing of modern high life. Kings and queens, lords, ladies and gentlemen, may have a value still in town and country, but in poetry or story they are no longer of any account. Somehow they have lost all poetic interest to us. It is very remarkable, and may well set us thinking. It is, of course, one more revolutionary symptom; whereas Shakespeare could yet testify to the striking and beautiful results that issued from the ordered ranks of mediæval civilization. His kings and queens not only show manners; they also lead in thought, feeling, and action, and draw to them our chief interest.

In estimating the politics they exhibit and their author, we must, of course, remember that Shakespeare was a dramatic writer who had an audience to please, and who was at the same time severely tongue-tied by authority; he was in royal employ, and meddled with matters of state or religion at his peril. But giving due weight to these considerations, which may explain his strange silence on many topics to us of the greatest interest, I venture to think that he regarded the politics of his own time and of every time as the special field of intrigue and ambition. Has he not described the politician as "one who would circumvent God"? I think that Shakespeare, who so beautifully honoured every personal and domestic feeling, was not so rich in public feeling,—the explanation being that the revolutionary spirit had penetrated public life more deeply than private life. I draw my conclusions from this, that his great characters act from personal motives, not from noble social motive; they do not show greatness in thought or action for the public good. Nor do any of his historical plays, —take "King John" or "Julius Cæsar,"—at all adequately

portray the social principles which the struggle described really involved. To such political scepticism, however, on Shakespeare's part, there are some important exceptions. He had evidently a very high feeling for the national independence of his country,—a generous and not aggressive patriotism, though he was hardly so conscious as his great mediæval predecessor of the co-operation that is continually going on between the various members of the West. Again,—and in this connection it is pleasant to think of his martial name and his martial ancestry,—Shakespeare was a most earnest lover of his country's peace. Further, he highly appreciated the great general office of the Temporal Monarchy,—about which it is well for me to say a few words. The Temporal Monarchy was his grand political theme. This was a most necessary and characteristic institution of Shakespeare's age, both in England and the Continental States. For upon the decisive decline of Catholic Feudalism two very dangerous symptoms had manifested themselves. The Papacy, losing its hold over the Intellect and Morals, began to develop more and more an outrageous Theocratic ambition; and the Feudal Chiefs, having fulfilled the noble object of their military energy, the defence of Western Civilization, of which the Crusades were the final chapter, fell into incessant intestine warfare for mere family or personal purposes. Against both these menacing dangers arose nearly everywhere a strong Temporal Monarchy. This monarchy was an Aaron's rod, swallowing up all the other rods; it absorbed or subordinated to itself all other powers; by force or other means, for it had small scruples, it seized upon the direction of all social functions, spiritual as well as temporal; and aimed both at home and abroad at universal empire. Such had been the recent history of England. The internecine Wars of the Roses had ended in the establishment of the despotic Tudor sovereignty, and Catholicism was plundered and driven out to make way for a servile State Church, of which King Henry VIII. was pleased to declare himself the supreme head. Such a monarchy, holding the temporal sword in one hand and the spiritual sword in the other, was necessarily a coarse political engine, often a

very brutal one; it was soon to be dangerous to popular liberties, and was eventually destined to become, elsewhere than in England, the standing fortress of repression and retrogression. But in Shakespeare's time the sovereign with his sacred hereditary claim was the guardian of peace, the fountain of honour, the patron of progress, the central force of national greatness. Assuredly this was Shakespeare's own feeling. We see it by his choice of subjects. Everybody must notice how many of his plays turn on the guilt of usurpation and rebellion. Everybody also must feel how he appeals to each and all of the various notions which together make up the composite notion, the kingly divine right; how painter-like he displays the sacred pomp of royal ceremony; how priestlike he dwells on the holy anointing; how in statesman's phrase he puts forth the sanctity of the law, the guilt of civil strife, the blessings of peace: in short, how in a hundred passages by the force of his genius he almost does make us believe that somehow a divinity belongs to the person of a king.

But with all this feeling for the majesty of a king and his divine authority, there was an equally, nay, more powerful insistence by Shakespeare that a king was a mere man,—a man sharing in all the infirmities and contingencies, inward and outward, of other men. Of this Shakespeare is the most glorious voice in literature. It forms the subject of several plays; it continually furnishes magnificent artistic contrasts,—such as the wet seaway asleep on the high and giddy mast, and the sleepless king,—and gives the poet scope for a philosophy which, echoing as it does the modern levelling spirit, possesses an extraordinary attraction to every reader. Shakespeare was conscious of the revolutionary tendency of such speculations. He always, I think, associates them with infirmity of body or mind, often with madness; the wise, strong man he makes speak in praise of social order.

Everything, however, shows that Shakespeare was infected with the revolutionary spirit of the time, especially as regards politics and religion; and, in consequence, notwithstanding all his genius and generosity, he could not

attain a true historic spirit. He had not even any religion in the full sense of the word. Was not, then, Shakespeare a member of the Protestant Church of England established by law? No doubt he attended Stratford Church here, on Sundays, perhaps regularly, as required by law. He certainly was baptized and married and buried with Christian rites; and probably he conformed not unwillingly to various Christian customs. For all that, he was no pious Christian. His faith, we can see, was not really Christian at all; it was a loose Deism, that like a loose cloak went on easily over all, and could be slipped off yet more easily. I do him no wrong here. It was the most forward-looking faith of the time. It was virtually the faith of Bacon and Des Cartes, and a host of renowned thinkers, philosophers, statesmen, poets and artists, down to the illustrious, calm student of yesterday, Charles Darwin. Such a faith can hardly be called a religion,—without a creed, without a worship, without a spiritual society, without pious habits,—without the discipline and moral help, the pleasure and the pride, that come from these. But to them it seemed natural and necessary; it kept them free from what they felt to be intellectual bondage, and lent a vague general consecration to their various, very various, conclusions and conceptions, which were framed on quite other grounds.

How then could Shakespeare bear witness to the crowning truth that Man tends to become more and more religious? Directly he could not. Shut out from the historic spirit, having no theory of human progress, ignorant in fact of what the earlier religions had done for man, and virtually alienate from every religion then acknowledged, he could not directly express this precious truth, because he could not see it. Nevertheless, I claim him with confidence as a witness on our side, though an imperfect one. I do so because with all his intellectual greatness he combines incomparably rich affection, rendering always spontaneous homage to the supremacy of Feeling, which represents the religious temper. Did he not widen for us our affection, our religious judgment? I might cite many instances. I cite one—Falstaff. Falstaff was a notorious

sinner in more ways than one; one of the wicked, as he himself says, and, moreover, visited as such by Shakespeare's poetic justice, for the old reveller dies forlorn in no better house than Mrs. Quickly's. A Christian Church, Catholic or Protestant, which, according to its absolute doctrine, divides us all into sheep and goats, could not help regarding Falstaff as one of the goats, could do no other than avert its face and hold up holy hands of reprobation. Not so Shakespeare, nor we under his teaching. We love Falstaff, sinner as he is,—he makes us happy,—he does us good. Why? For these two reasons at least. First, he loved human company, and loved to give them his own; and, secondly, his temper was golden. Not a few disasters had he to encounter in his career, but he met them all with glorious good-humour, matched with a frolicsome wit, that not merely covers his retreat in all circumstances, but brings him out jocund himself and triumphant through everything and over all adversaries, Prince, Chief Justice, old Sir Hugh Evans, Mr. Justice Shallow, the ladies and all. And so, I say, we love him, as did Shakespeare his creator, and as Bardolph, his boon companion, who said of him when he heard he was dead, "Would I were with him, wheresome'er he is, either in heaven or in hell!"¹ Others enjoy this, as we Positivists do,—they can't help it,—but what Religion claiming to uphold moral order but Positivism claims also to honour this? There is none. Shakespeare guides to a wide fraternal sympathy, a relative judgment, a truly human morality, which no theological doctrine could ever sanction, but which are systematically honoured in the Positivist faith.

I end as I began. More than two hundred and fifty summers and winters have now passed over the grave of this glorious wise poet, this brother-making brother-man, William Shakespeare. That grave has already become a place of pilgrimage for the whole earth; that name is already one of the best beloved bonds of human unity, peace, and concord.

¹ I ought to have added the beginning of Mrs. Quickly's reply: "Nay, sure he's not in hell: he's in Arthur's bosom, if ever man went to Arthur's bosom."

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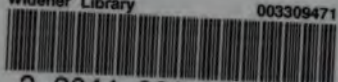
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